



## The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare

Volume 15  
Issue 4 *December*

Article 3

December 1988

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### Recommended Citation

Matsuoka, Jon and Kelly, Terry (1988) "The Environmental, Economic, and Social Impacts of Resort Development and Tourism on Native Hawaiians," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 15 : Iss. 4 , Article 3.  
Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol15/iss4/3>

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# The Environmental, Economic, and Social Impacts of Resort Development and Tourism on Native Hawaiians

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*Hawaii is currently undergoing major changes associated with land and industrial development. A shift in focus from agriculture to tourism has led to massive land development throughout the islands in order to accommodate this growing industry. The people affected most by these environmental changes are the indigenous people of Hawaii who exist in close harmony with the land and sea. As natural habitats are destroyed, fish and other food sources disappear. This has profound affects upon the behavior and practices of Hawaiian people who must look to other means for subsistence. Changes in the environment are inherently tied to changes in traditional Hawaiian lifestyles. In the past two decades, incidences of crime and incarceration, drug and alcohol abuse, child abuse, and suicide have reached monumental proportions among native Hawaiians. These levels are highly disproportionate to their population and increases appear to coincide with increased modernization. This paper examines the conflicts and changes experienced by native Hawaiians through the use of an ecological model.*

The Hawaiian archipelago exists as one of the most isolated areas in the world—thousands of miles from the nearest land mass. Anthropologists theorize that people first arrived on the Hawaiian Islands around 1,200 years ago, making it one of the last places on earth to be inhabited by people. For a thousand years, Hawaiians lived in isolation from the world until Captain James Cook arrived in 1778 (Daws, 1974).

From this point of “rediscovery”, sweeping changes occurred in Hawaii. Hawaiians were to immediately feel the im-

part of this contact with the West. Westerners transmitted diseases to a native population that had no natural immunities to them. Waves of epidemics reduced the estimated population of 300,000 in 1778 to 34,000 by 1893 (Native Hawaiians Study Commission, 1983).

With this increased exposure to the West, Hawaiians also began to lose control over what was being disseminated throughout their culture. Outside influences were able to penetrate the socialization process and initiate new standards and criteria for living. A common strategy among Christian missionaries, once they established a foothold in a society, was to develop schools for the children.

The first missionaries arrived in Hawaii in 1820 and by 1831 one thousand missionary schools had been built (Daws, 1974). The indoctrination of Christian attitudes and beliefs at this level insured that subsequent generations would live according to these doctrines and value systems. The missionaries from new England introduced different mores into Hawaiian society, further compounding the confusion and disruption resulting from the economic, political, and social changes.

This domination by the missionaries continued into the twentieth century, creating dramatic changes in the economy. The people of God eventually became the people of commerce. The "Big Five", a conglomeration of corporations who have dominated Hawaiian business for most of this century are comprised of families who are direct descendants of the first missionaries to arrive on Hawaiian shores (Daws, 1974).

These families were also instrumental in overthrowing the Hawaiian monarchy and changing the system of land ownership so that they could partake in owning land. The new land division system known as the "Great Mehele" changed the entire structure of Hawaiian society as people became dispossessed of their land. By the end of the nineteenth century, whites owned four acres of land for every one owned by a native (Daws, 1974).

Historical issues play a significant part in contemporary issues concerning the people of Hawaii. In the last 25 years, Hawaii has experienced its most dramatic social and economic changes associated with economic growth. A shift in focus from agriculture to tourism has led to massive land transformations

throughout the islands in order to accommodate this growing industry.

The construction of hotels and recreational facilities has often been in direct conflict with the interests of many local residents who are wary of change and the effects it will have on their livelihood. Many wish to preserve their culture and lifestyle which they see as threatened by development projects and population growth. Despite this concern, the island economy has become increasingly dependent on tourism and resort development over the years. It is interesting to note that many of the major proponents of tourism are the wealthy descendants of missionaries who are attempting to convert their agricultural lands into more profitable hotels and recreational facilities.

Since 1960, the income generated from tourism has increased well over 2,000% and the trajectory of growth is projected to steadily increase. In 1986 alone, Hawaii experienced about a 15% increase in visitors over the year before—or about 5.6 million tourists. By the year 2005, the Hawaii Visitor's Bureau estimates the number of tourists in the state will double (Pai, 1984). These numbers are astounding given that there are only one million people residing in Hawaii (U.S. Census, 1980). And increases in tourism may exceed even the highest estimates in future years as Americans opt to vacation in Hawaii instead of terrorist plagued Europe.

The people affected most by these economic and environmental changes are the indigenous people of Hawaii who once existed in close harmony with the land and sea. As natural habitats are destroyed, fish and other food sources disappear. As land prices escalate, housing and farming become more expensive, and communities, especially rural ones, are severely impacted.

These changes have profound effects upon the behavior and practices of Hawaiian people who must look to other means for subsistence. Changes in the environment and one's ability to depend on it for subsistence are inherently tied to changes in traditional Hawaiian lifestyles and attitudes.

Steadily over the years, premier hotels have acquired rights to develop along some of Hawaii's most scenic and pristine coastlines. These developments have cumulatively deprived Ha-

waiians of natural resources on which they have long relied for their subsistence. In addition, the rate of tourist growth has made the economy overly dependent on this one sector. This leaves Hawaii extremely vulnerable to external economic forces and with an economy increasingly characterized by low-paying service jobs.

Research in other areas in the Pacific region suggests that coastal modifications are the cause of the decline in fisheries and attendant losses of the fisherman's reliance on the ocean for support (Kiste, 1974). A broader concern, however, is the cultural deterioration which can accompany development, particularly the loss of native skills and the diminishment of ties to the land and sea. Since the land constitutes a major element of the islander's identity, these losses undermine the culture, values and lifestyle. Frequently, behavioral changes subsequent to lifestyle alteration induce such negative attributes as increased substance abuse and the proliferation of welfare dependence. The available data would suggest that this is particularly true for Hawaii and other islands in the Pacific (Marshall, 1979; Native Hawaiian Study Commission, 1983).

A dramatic example of this situation can be seen in the South Pacific archipalegoes of Enewetak and Bikini where residents have been displaced because nuclear testing has contaminated their natural food and water supplies. Traditional activities such as fishing and gathering have disappeared and been replaced by people awaiting shipments of canned goods from the United States (Kiste, 1974).

This situation has not only resulted in health problems associated with dietary changes, but the loss of traditional practices. The lack of activity has created a vacuum within their culture that is rooted in their self-sufficiency and their ties to the ocean. The loss of food gathering and preparation practices have left the islanders in a state of boredom and listlessness which has contributed to such social problems as substance abuse, suicide, and a soaring population growth (Kiste, 1974).

The remainder of this paper examines contemporary environmental, economic and socio-cultural impacts associated with industrial growth in Hawaii. An ecological perspective (e.g. Germain, 1979) will be used to provide insights into the nature

and consequences of transactions between people and their environment. The focus is on the native Hawaiian group who experience a unique set of circumstances as indigenous people amidst their rapidly changing homelands.

It is sometimes difficult to speak of native Hawaiians as a homogeneous group because of differences according to their amount of Hawaiian blood, acculturation, political orientation, and area of residence. Yet there is a sense of Hawaiian identity which transcends these variations. Particular emphasis will be given to the impact of tourism and resort development as it affects native Hawaiians.

### Environmental Impacts

Natural conditions in Hawaii closely resemble those of other Pacific archipalegoes. A delicate ecology has taken millenia to develop in an environmentally insulated condition. Natural organisms exist in a closely defined network of interdependence and have developed little resistance to outside elements. The remoteness of Hawaii makes it especially vulnerable to sudden environmental change.

The recent construction of resorts and other tourist-related development have had a severe impact on the fragile ecology of coastal and conservation areas. There are more plants and animals indigenous to Hawaii that have become extinct or are on the federal government's endangered species list than on the entire North American continent. Hawaii has only 0.2% of the nation's land, but 72.1% of its extinctions and 27% of its rare or endangered species. Of the 150 "natural communities" in the islands, 88 of them are under siege by development (*Honolulu Star Bulletin*, December 17, 1986).

One project under construction along the West coast of the Big Island of Hawaii, advertised as the world's largest hotel, will encompass 31,000 acres of land (*Honolulu Star Bulletin*, April 8, 1987). In clearing the ground for construction, the resort developers destroyed 70% of the unique anchialine ponds. Sitting atop the lava beds, these ponds were home to species of shrimp that existed nowhere else in the world—some were yet to be classified. Rare migrating bird species which used these ponds as resting stations during their trans-Pacific flights have disap-

peared (Matsuoka, 1987). The water in these ponds fed by underground freshwater springs and ocean currents were also believed by Hawaiians to have healing powers.

This raises a critical question concerning how people are affected when their natural resources are threatened or depleted. There are already residual signs that this process has been set in motion. For example, longtime fishermen have repeatedly complained about the quantity and quality of the catch in recent years. The Hawaii Department of Land and Resources blames the decline on over-fishing and is seeking to restrict fishing to certain areas on a rotating basis. However, the fishermen blame their diminishing catch on development and pollution. Fishermen claim that pollution and siltation over the coral reefs by construction run-off has led to the destruction of natural habitats and feeding grounds for fish (*Honolulu Star Bulletin*, May 5, 1987).

Resorts tend to change the complexion of a community as outsiders in search of work, gravitate to them in droves. Mushrooming population growth can be observed in any of the popular resort areas found in the islands. For example, Kailua-Kona, in West Hawaii, is currently the fastest growing district in the state with a 188% increase between 1970 and 1980 (Knox, 1984). This district also has the island's highest rent and real property costs.

Prior to 1970, the Kona area was known as a remote enclave of coffee and macadamia-nut farmers. Today, it has been slated as the next major area for resort construction. If major resort developments proceed as planned, the region's population will continue to grow according to this trend.

As the population increases in these areas, other parallel development concerns will need to be addressed. For example, transportation becomes an issue with more people commuting to and from the workplace. Highway systems require improvements in order to alleviate traffic congestion. As infrastructure expenditures rise, so do taxes. For farmers and other rural dwellers who exist in a chronic state of economic uncertainty, tax hikes increase financial burdens (*West Hawaii Today*, October 10, 1986). The escalation of land prices forces farmers to cut their losses and sell-out to developers willing to pay premium prices. Prime farm land is then converted into housing and other de-

velopments. Consequently, the face of the community and the lifestyle are dramatically altered.

Wealthy investors and land speculators think in terms of good investments and the more picturesque the location, the more likely it is to draw tourists. Over the years, land developments have cumulatively deprived native Hawaiians of their previous access to natural resources. Many of the traditional fishing and gathering grounds have been made inaccessible to nonhotel guests. Hotels are often situated in such a way as to provide exclusive ambience for its guests while at the same time preventing access of "outsiders" to the shoreline (*Hawaii Tribune-Herald*, August 15, 1982).

The construction of resorts has also had a significant visual impact upon shoreline areas. Once spectacular coastal views are now blocked from view or marred by man-made features. Land-use patterns have systematically consumed open spaces and scenic resources only offering them to a minuscule number of hotel guests.

Resorts also rely upon water and soil resources that are vital to the sustenance of the community. Political battles erupt over users' rights as developers and farmers compete for common resources. On the Big island of Hawaii, developers have moved truckloads of topsoil from higher elevations to create seaside golf courses atop lava beds. This practice not only ravages flora and fauna, it lays waste to potentially valuable agricultural lands. An exorbitant amount of scarce groundwater is being used to keep golf courses green while water for agricultural purposes is being stringently controlled.

Developers are banking on new technologies such as new drilling methods to tap high altitude water aquifers of the mountains and techniques to convert seawater to freshwater (*Honolulu Star Bulletin*, January 1, 1987). An unlimited water supply could mean unbridled growth in the relatively arid district of West Hawaii that to date has adopted a water rationing program to cope with a burgeoning population.

### Economic Impacts

Millions of tourists are drawn to Hawaii because of its sandy beaches, clean waters, coral reefs and images of "paradise". They are oblivious, however, to the damage and destruction caused



by their mushrooming presence in the state. The tourist industry fails to recognize that their main attractions are in jeopardy of being lost in large part because of the rate and narrow focus of economic growth.

The rate of tourist growth has made the economy overly dependent on this one sector, leaving Hawaii extremely vulnerable to external economic forces. An airline strike, economic recession or fuel crisis would be catastrophic for a tourist economy sitting in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. It is an economy characterized by large profits to a minority and low-paying service jobs to the majority.

### *Demographic Variables*

The crux of the argument in favor of resort development is the promise of jobs and economic prosperity for communities. Developers have launched publicity campaigns which emphasize employment opportunities for local residents. They have also attempted to appeal to people's sense of family commitment by promising jobs to keep their children and grandchildren on the islands. The propaganda campaigns closely resemble the approaches of the early missionaries in procuring converts. Throughout the state school system, tourism and resort developments are marketed to young people as the greatest economic resource in Hawaii.

A primary concern among many local residents is whether or not successive generations can sustain a life for themselves in Hawaii. Members of younger generations, especially those who are academically or professionally inclined, tend to choose careers unrelated to tourism. Many of them view tourist-related occupations as demeaning or a misuse of their talents. Aspects of tourism have been described in terms of neocolonialism where local residents are subjected to subordinate positions that serve whites (Erisman, 1983). In Hawaii, many local residents choose to avoid these types of positions by seeking jobs in other fields.

Because industrial development in Hawaii has been a relatively one-dimensional process related to tourism, alternatives for employment are scarce and highly competitive. As a result, many qualified individuals are migrating to the American mainland in search of jobs. Sometimes referred to as the "brain drain", this recent phase of migration continues unabated and has in-

cluded a large number of highly skilled and well-educated emigres (Pai, 1984).

The 1980 Census reported 258,000 Hawaii-born persons living in the other 49 states—almost 32% of all Hawaii-born persons. At the same time, more than 55,000 native Hawaiians, or 31% of the nation's total were living on the Mainland. Most of these migrants had moved because job opportunities were more numerous elsewhere, the pay was higher, and the cost of living was lower (Pai, 1985).

In-depth surveys revealed that out-migrants from Hawaii tended to have better educations, held higher status jobs, and enjoyed higher incomes than their counterparts in Hawaii (Pai, 1985). Furthermore, many desired to return to the islands, but were prevented by the negative aspects of the conditions—fewer jobs, lower pay, and higher prices—that had driven them away initially.

Meanwhile, the Hawaii Department of Planning and Economic Development projects that 40% of the total population increase expected between 1980 and 2005 will stem from the immigration of people from out-of-state. That means that by 2005, roughly 27% of Hawaii's total population over the age of five will have come from out-of-state (Pai, 1984).

The wholesale turnover in Hawaii's population base will have profound social and cultural affects upon the islands. Based on previous trends, the large majority of the immigrants will be Caucasians from the U.S. Mainland while the bulk of those leaving Hawaii will be of Asian-Pacific heritage (Farrell, 1982). The reduction of the critical mass of local residents paired with the influx of mainlanders will undoubtedly continue to shift the values and traditions of one of the most culturally rich and diverse places in the world.

### *Income and Cost of Living*

Hawaii residents are affected by an economy where wages and household incomes continue to decline while the cost of living steadily increases. When tourism first took over Hawaii's economy in the 1970's, for every twenty dollars in pay raises for workers, their cost of living went up thirty. Early in the 1980's, 48% of Hawaii's families earned less than \$20,000 a year while almost 60% earned less than \$25,000. The government's median

standard of living minimum for Hawaii is well over \$34,000 for a family of four. This economic trend of contrasting low wages and high cost of living continues to worsen during the 1980's (Stannard, 1985; 1986).

Hawaii's segmented labor market which affords little opportunity for upward mobility perpetuates the economic oppression and sense of powerlessness among native Hawaiians. The ample lower ranking positions are usually filled by native Hawaiians and other local residents. The fewer middle- and upper-management positions tend to be occupied by recruits from the mainland (Community Resources and Datametric Research, 1987).

### *Housing*

The ratio of housing costs to personal income in Hawaii is another critical area of concern related to economic impacts. Hawaii is currently experiencing a housing crisis throughout the islands. Even though hundreds of acres of land are removed from the protection of preservation zoning and conservation efforts, much of this development is for condominium and single-family housing. In recent years, only 2% of home buyers have been local first-time purchasers. The majority are wealthy out-of-state speculators (Stannard, 1985; 1986).

The reasons for the housing crisis are reflected in the inability of local residents to afford owner-occupied housing in their own state. In the early 1980's the average per capita income in Hawaii increased by a little over \$5,000, whereas the average selling price for a house or condominium increased over \$80,000 (Standard, 1985; 1986). Scores of native Hawaiians, unable to pay for a place to live, have resorted to illegally residing on public beaches. The "beach people," as they have come to be known, are symptomatic of Hawaii's trend in economic development and represent the tragic loss of land and livelihood in the face of modernization (*Honolulu Star Bulletin*, October 16, 1984).

### *Social Impacts*

As the Hawaiian islands have become more developed, the native Hawaiian people are consistently faced with issues related

to changes in their lifestyle and culture. Traditionally, native Hawaiians have cultivated a strong identification with the natural world. There is a keen understanding of the concept of an ecological whole in which there are many interacting and mutually dependent systems. Harmony and stability with the natural world are clearly visible in traditional Hawaiian values (Howard, 1974).

A central concern relating to tourism and resort development is how these changes affect the socio-psychological well-being of individuals who are largely dependent upon land and marine resources for self-identity and subsistence. Activities such as fishing and gathering of food sources are an integral part of their lifestyle. These activities not only consume a large part of their time but also place them in a web of co-existence and interdependence with other natural systems. This relationship has been a core value for the native Hawaiians and is reflected strongly in all aspects of Hawaiian culture (Native Hawaiians Study Commission, 1983).

The decline in economic conditions throughout the state corresponds with an overall decline in the quality of life for its residents—especially native Hawaiians. Difficulties in native Hawaiian adaptation to Western norms are manifested through a disproportionately high rate of social problems. In 1982, while native Hawaiians comprised 12% of the total state population, they made up 30.8 of those receiving Aid to Dependent Families (Native Hawaiians Study Commission, 1983).

Poor economic conditions are inherently linked to illicit activities such as burglary and robbery, drug-selling and welfare fraud. The percent of native Hawaiian adults arrested in Hawaii in 1981 was proportionally greater than the native Hawaiian percentage share of the entire population. Among juveniles, native Hawaiians comprised the largest percent of arrests for each crime examined. Native Hawaiians also comprise the highest percentage of all those incarcerated in the state (Hawaiians Study Commission, 1983).

Economic insecurity is linked to spouse abuse, drug abuse, alcoholism and mental health problems. These patterns also lead to personal and social alienation, loss of self-esteem, and estrangement from the values of mainstream society. Mental health

assessments indicate that native Hawaiians have a higher than expected incidence of personality disorders, mental retardation, and drug abuse relative to their proportion of the population (U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services, 1986). Native Hawaiian males comprise the highest in suicide rates in the state: 22.5 per 100,000 compared to 13.5 per 100,000 for all other males (Native Hawaiians Study Commission, 1983).

Native Hawaiians are also plagued by numerous health problems. A once robust people who lived off the riches of the land presently have the highest rate of heart disease, cancer, and strokes in the state. They also have the highest infant mortality rate—14 per 1,000 live births compared to a statewide 10 per 1,000; and the lowest life expectancy—67 years compared to a statewide average of 74 years (U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services, 1986; Native Hawaiians Study Commission, 1983).

In the educational arena, native Hawaiians comprise 30 percent of the school-age population and have the highest rates of academic and behavioral problems reported, the highest levels of absenteeism, and the lowest levels of performance. Only 4.6% of all adult Hawaiians over 25 years of age have completed college, compared to a statewide average of 11.3% (Native Hawaiians Study Commission, 1983).

As the prospects for educational attainment, economic security, and upward mobility continue to erode, communities at the lower end of the economic ladder will continue to shoulder the greatest burden of suffering. Furthermore, social service caseloads, as well as welfare costs, will continue to soar in the face of declining public and private support.

A recent report on the social service conditions for the West section of the Big Island of Hawaii, present some staggering findings. In the Kona district, for example, a crisis child protective service worker has a caseload of 89 (*Honolulu Star Bulletin*, April 18, 1987). In the nearby district of Waimea/Kohala, one adult service worker has 156 cases. The ratio of cases per worker makes it impossible to adequately serve those in dire need of services. To compound matters, West Hawaii's population is expected to increase by more than 87,000 people during the next 20 years due to the rapid growth spurred by a booming resort industry. At the present rate, it will be impossible for human

services to keep pace with this type of growth. The negative social costs of boom development has been thoroughly documented in a wide range of investigations (Glick, 1981; Luces, 1971; Riffel, 1975).

### Impact Assessments

The ecological and socio-cultural disruption of the Hawaiian islands has been interpreted in a variety of ways. Resort development and tourism are often defended in terms which stress their economic advantages and minimize their negative social effects. There is a lack of accurate and sensitive assessment of these effects on native Hawaiians and the islands themselves. Often social impact assessments are done by those who represent the interests of resort developers who typically ignore the needs and concerns of native Hawaiians.

A primary and consistent tool for assessing the impacts of resort construction are Environmental Impact Statements (EIS). When developers plan a new project in designated conservation areas, state lands, or areas considered to be environmentally at risk (e.g., coastal areas) they are required by law to write an EIS. The EIS is submitted to the government agency who has jurisdiction over the development. After a review process, a decision is made over whether or not the developers can proceed. The EIS is composed of sections analyzing the probable and unavoidable impacts upon the social and physical environment.

It is the responsibility of the developer to prepare the EIS and it is a common practice for them to hire specialists in private practice from the community to examine and document the projected effects of the development project. The income of many private contractors relies exclusively upon contract work from major development firms. This means that they must prepare documents that satisfy the developers or risk jeopardizing their chances for future contract work. Given these conditions, one might safely assume that the objectivity of the documentation concerning social and physical impacts is questionable.

Major difficulties arise when one attempts to conceptualize the issues surrounding tourism and resort construction in the context of environmental impacts and social change. For the most part, development in the islands has been piece-meal, lack-

ing a master plan or consideration of the long-term, cumulative effects. Assessing the impact of growth in certain areas has been conducted on an ad hoc basis and only after considerable strain has been placed upon existing infrastructure and public works.

### Conclusion

The decimation of the land and water resources affects everyone living or visiting the Hawaiian islands, it is especially detrimental, however, to the native Hawaiian culture where the natural environment is an integral part of everyday existence. The people whose namesake is synonymous with their homeland have been rendered powerless amidst the changes brought forth by outsiders. We have seen history repeat itself from the changes brought about by the early missionaries to the current behaviors and attitudes of developers. After reviewing the social, environmental and cultural impacts, one has to pose the question of who is truly benefiting from resort development and tourism and reaping the bulk of the economic profits. The data suggest that it is not native Hawaiians.

Continued development in Hawaii is viewed as inevitable and many, including the native Hawaiian population, express a sense of helplessness and inability to effect change. This sense of powerlessness is coupled by the confusion caused by an overreliance on the tourist industry for economic survival. Without viable alternatives, native Hawaiians are coerced into a dependent relationship with resort development and the tourist industry as a whole.

The human aspects of land development and social change have long been ignored by developers and politicians. A critical analysis of the social ramifications of current and future projects may prevent the further destruction of culture and lifeways or at least allow decision-makers to deliberate more responsibly. Alternative strategies for appropriate mitigation might include: (a) independent, government sponsored social impact assessments, (b) the documentation of resorts that serve as exemplary models for cultural and environmental sensitivity, (c) contractual requirements vis-a-vis job training for indigenous people at levels other than menial labor, (d) the establishment of a state task force on economic diversification, (e) the promotion of com-

munity-based economic development projects, (f) major fines issued to resorts for noncompliance to be paid into community economic development projects, and (g) a social services impact tax on development projects to assist with the "prevention" of projected negative social costs. Social workers, by virtue of their background and training, are in a natural position to assume an instrumental role in the development and implementation of strategies to mitigate negative impacts.

The preservation of traditional lifestyles has numerous social and economic benefits. But beyond these realms lies a fundamental humanitarian issue. The loss of cultural traditions in the face of "progress" means the loss, in a general sense, of a part of our humanity. Preventive measures need to be taken to preserve cultural traditions and eliminate some of the excesses of the past.

The issue becomes one of conscience. Too often, the needs of native Hawaiians have been discounted and negated. Due to motives of short-term gain and individual profit, a culture which has valued the concepts of collectivity, mutuality and ecological compatibility is being systematically destroyed. We need to consider the effects of resort development and tourism upon the well-being of all of Hawaii's people, especially its original inhabitants.

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